Elementary Teacher Guide (Grades Pre-K – 5)
College and Career Competency: *Conflict Management*

Definition:

Conflict is a term used to describe a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, or goals. While manifestations of conflict can range from minor disagreements to physical violence, conflict is a natural part of human interaction. Along with competing for limited resources, conflict can occur because of individual or group differences in rank, objectives, views, and traditions (Ayas, Deniz, Kağan, & Kenç, 2010). Conflict management skills can lessen those tensions or resolve problems that arise among individuals or groups who are at variance with one another. In short, conflict management can be defined as knowing how you usually respond to conflict, the reasons behind specific conflicts, and taking steps to resolve conflicts (Gaumer Erickson & Noonan, 2016).

Essential Components for Students:

1. Understand your natural response to conflict.
2. Understand the context of the conflict, including the perspectives of all involved.
3. Apply a conflict management approach that is appropriate to the situation.

Competency Sequence for Students:

These targets describe how students demonstrate competency knowledge at each grade cluster (Noonan & Gaumer Erickson, 2018). By the end of each grade cluster, each student:

	Conflict Management
Pre-K	• Understands conflict is normal and natural and that we are all different in many ways. • Describes and demonstrates simple conflict management techniques (asks for help, takes turns, finds a different toy play with). • Identifies and labels their own basic feelings and emotions.
K-2	• Identifies natural reasons for conflict and understands that conflict is normal. • Demonstrates the ability to listen to others' ideas and realizes other people may view things differently. • Identifies the problem in a conflict situation and states feelings and behaviors related to the problem. • Uses words and other positive strategies to resolve social conflicts and nurture relationships.
3-5	• Demonstrates understanding of how one typically responds to various conflicts. • Demonstrates understanding of what anger indicates and possible triggers of anger in self and others. • Restates anger statements as "I" statements, expressing feelings clearly. • Identifies a variety of conflict management strategies to apply to various situations. • Displays active listening skills to respectfully listen to and reflect other people's feelings and positions.

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Research:

- Intervening as early as preschool to address conflict, aggression, and bullying in young children is important because these behaviors can escalate into more significant aggression if left unaddressed, leading to long-term negative social skills and peer interactions as the children age (Leff, Power, Manz, Costigan, & Nabors, 2001; Levine & Tamburrino, 2014;).
  - By providing students with diverse texts and lessons, students will learn to not only tolerate, but also appreciate and even celebrate, the uniqueness in other people (Thornberg, 2010, as cited in Levine & Tamburrino, 2014).
  - High-risk students who participate in early aggression prevention/intervention programs can better avoid future increased aggression (Leff et al., 2011).
- The 12-week Kindness curriculum (https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/sign-up-to-receive-the-kindness-curriculum) is a preschool curriculum based on mindfulness that emphasizes empathy, gratitude, and sharing (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2015). Teachers reported that participating children improved on "indicators of learning, social-emotional development, and health," (p. 49) as well as in grades and social competence.
- Peer mediation programs that include conflict management training and strategies can be successfully introduced in elementary schools (Bickmore, 2002; Cunningham, Cunningham, Martorelli, Tran, Young, Zacharias, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, & Ackigoz, 1994).
  - In a study conducted in 1990-1991 (Johnson et al., 1994), students in grades 1-6 who received 30 minutes of conflict resolution training a day over six weeks were able to learn negotiation and mediation procedures/skills and apply them in real conflicts. Johnson and Johnson (1996) conducted seven studies on the effectiveness of the *Teaching Students to be Peacemakers* program with grades 1-9 between 1988 and 1994. They concluded that:
    - conflict resolution can be taught,
    - it has a positive impact on academic achievement when integrated into an English literature class, and
    - taking a whole school approach to the training, compared to only training a small number of students, was more effective.
  - The Center for Conflict Resolution trained recent high school graduates to provide three days of peer mediation and conflict management instruction to groups of 25-30 students in grades 3-5 at 28 urban elementary schools (about 700 students in total). Researchers gathered quantitative and qualitative data in the first 12 months after the training program. One finding was that the conflict management program had a small but significant positive impact on student understanding of conflict resolution and problem solving, as well as peer relationships and self-assessment of social skills (Bickmore, 2002).
- Researchers (Cunningham et al., 1998) have found that in elementary school, most conflicts, aggression, and bullying occur on the playground. The research suggests this happens due to less interventions by adults in that setting and children being afraid to inform on their peers. Sometimes, bystanders will justify the behaviors or join in with the bully.
  - Children bullied on a playground experience greater stress, affecting school performance.

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- o The children perpetrating the bullying are more at risk for being bullied in the future due to peer rejection
- Bullying affects large swaths of the student population, and encompasses a range of actions, including "not just physical aggression, but also verbal aggression, including verbal harassment, spreading rumors, or social rejection and isolation" (Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2011).
- A unique and more pervasive form of bullying is cyberbullying (Betts & Houston, 2012). Cyberbullying is defined as "an individual or a group willfully using information and communication involving electronic technologies to facilitate deliberate and repeated harassment or threat to another individual or group by sending or posting cruel text and/or graphics using technological means" and is a "systematic abuse of power and control over another individual" (Mason, 2008).
- In a study of a peer-mediated conflict management programs for elementary students, (Cunningham et al., 1998), 5th grade students were trained to mediate conflicts during recess. The study involved three schools with students aged 4-10 (total school population 1,215) with a diverse socio-economic family makeup. The student mediators received about 15 hours of mediation training conducted by teachers and school social workers. The students then patrolled quadrants of the playground in teams of two. Researchers found that the student mediators successfully resolved about 90% of conflicts, and that physically aggressive behavior on the playground dropped significantly.

Assessments:

- The *Conflict Management Formative Questionnaire* (Gaumer Erickson, Soukup, Noonan, & McGurn, 2016) is a 21-item instrument that measures a student's proficiency in the three essential components of conflict management: understanding one's natural response to conflict, understanding the context and perspectives involved in the conflict, and applying an appropriate approach based on the specific conflict. The *Conflict Management Formative Questionnaire* results can be used by both teachers and students to assess relative strengths and areas for improvement. Students are asked to rate themselves on each item using a five-point Likert-type scale (1=not very like me and 5=very like me); results are displayed on a 100-point scale. The results are automatically graphed for students once they complete the questionnaire, enabling them to immediately reflect on their results. Results are also available to the teacher for individual students and in aggregate. The questionnaire is currently being beta-tested with middle and high school students; while it is written at a sixth-grade reading level per the Flesch-Kincaid readability score, it can be adapted for grades 1-5 as necessary. The following example items represent each of the three essential components:
  - o I have thought about how I normally respond to conflicts. (Understand natural response)
  - o In an argument, I try to understand the other person's point of view. (Understand context and perspectives)
  - o When I'm involved in a disagreement, I stop and think about what I should say or do. (Apply approach)
  - o Results are immediately available for reflection.

  Teachers can access the questionnaire by setting up an account through http://researchcollaborationsurveys.org and following the instructions to launch a survey and administer it to students. Students (and teachers) can use individual questionnaire results to identify conflict management skills or behaviors that students can focus on cultivating or strengthening.

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- Caldas, Broaddus, and Winch (2016) developed a conflict management scale (http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2016.04.003) that can be used with respondents as young as 9. The questionnaire focuses on capturing the concept of constructive conflict management (rather than simply avoidance of violence) and the items were intentionally kept short to be suitable for younger respondents. The measure was tested with a group of youth participating in the Baltimore Outward Bound curriculum, which emphasizes constructive conflict management skills and provides opportunity to practice those skills. Some example items from the scale (p. 68) are included below:
  1. When somebody makes me angry, I give them a chance to explain things from their point of view.
  2. When somebody makes me mad, I try to explain what happened and why it upset me.
  3. Even if I don't agree with someone, I always listen to what they have to say.
  4. If there's a disagreement, I'm good at talking to people and finding a solution.
  5. Most arguments can be solved by talking it out.
- The CDC Measuring Bullying Victimization, Perpetration, and Bystander Experiences: A Compendium of Assessment Tools (Hamburger et al., 2011) contains a variety of tools to measure experiences and attitudes related to bullying. At the beginning of each section, the CDC Compendium lists a description of measures, including target groups/ages. Below is an example of tools provided in the collection that are appropriate to elementary school students with a reading age of 6-8 years and above. You can find the compendium at: http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullycompendium-a.pdf.
  o The "My Life in School" checklist (p. 19) is a 40-item measure that assesses students' social experience when interacting with their peers in school throughout the course of one week (Arora & Thompson, 1987, as cited in Hamburger et al., 2011). Students read statements such as, "This week another child called me names" and select the frequency of the event from the choices of "Never," "Once," or "More than once."
  o The "School Relationships Questionnaire" (p. 60) is an 18-item scale measuring victimization and perpetration of direct and relational bullying/aggression in school relationships. The questionnaire assesses youths 6-9 years old, using yes/no questions, such as, "Have other pupils said they wouldn't be friends with you anymore, or said they would tell-tale (tell other people things about you)?" that had follow-ups asking the frequency ("not very often," "often," "very often").
  o With the "Participant Role Questionnaire" (p. 101), students can assess the frequency of bullying they see perpetrated by others. They are given a definition of bullying, and then use a 3-point scale (never, sometimes, often) to identify the prevalence of bullying.

Instructional Practices:
- The 12 Week Kindness Curriculum, free after signing up on the site, (https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/sign-up-to-receive-the-kindness-curriculum), is a twelve week program for Pre-K children that teaches them how to cultivate kindness (Flook et al., 2015).
  o The lessons are designed to be practiced twice a week, for 20 minutes. The 24 lessons are broken into eight themes: 1) mindful bodies and planting seeds of kindness, 2) I feel emotions on the inside, 3) how I feel on the inside shows on the outside, 4) taking care of strong emotions on the inside and outside, 5) calming and working out problems, 6)

gratitude, 7) all people depend on each other and the earth, 8) gratitude and caring for our world and wrap-up.
  - o The free download also contains links for teachers to prepare themselves for teaching the kindness curriculum.
- Teaching Tolerance (n.d.), a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, offers educators lessons on anti-bullying and developing students' conflict resolution skills. This is available in grade-appropriate lessons spanning Pre-K to grade 12 through the following links:
  - o Grades K-2: "A Song for Anti-Bullying" https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/a-song-for-antibullying
  - o Grades K-2, 3-5: "Role Exclusion: Early grade lesson to confront gender stereotypes" https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/role-exclusion
  - o Grades 3-5, 6-8: "Where We Stand: Students examine how they face every day moral dilemmas and consider who and what influences their reactions when conflict arise." https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/where-we-stand
  - o Grades 6-8: "Conflict Resolution and Peace" https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/conflict-resolution-and-peace
  - o Teaching Tolerance also offers a "Learning Plan Builder" at https://www.tolerance.org/learning-plan/using-the-learning-plan-builder. The plan allows you to select one or more grade levels and one or more Social Justice domains, as well as choose essential questions and topics to align with your instructional goals.
- Levine and Tamburrino (2014) found that young children can learn about handling conflict, and that bullying behaviors were less prevalent in classrooms where children were taught conflict management skills than in classes where students did not receive instruction. Some ways to incorporate conflict management instruction for Pre-K-1st grade students are listed below (some of the interventions can be adapted for older students, as well):
  - o Lessons on conflict resolution in preschool can be integrated into circle time through reflective stories told by the educator. The stories give students a chance to think through and discuss different outcomes for the conflict.
    - ▪ Teachers could also take that opportunity to teach students how to discuss issues with each other. By giving students an object, such as a plastic ring (a "Peace Circle"), to hold onto, the students will have to face each other and take turns talking. By leaving the Peace Circles in easily accessible places around the classroom, the teacher could encourage the students to use it whenever they had conflict outside of circle time.
  - o Teachers could offer daily check-ins to give children the chance (individually) to share feelings and events happening in their lives. These check-ins bolster confidence and "increase school/class empathy and attachment" (Levine & Tamburrino, 2014).
  - o Peace journals allow students to express their feelings in words or pictures. Using the peace journals as a starting point can help open up communication between teachers and students.
  - o Posting feeling words around the classroom helps students identify their feelings and express themselves more clearly. Students will be able to access these words readily and better talk through conflicts.
- *Teaching Students to be Peacemakers (TSP)* is a program that has been integrated into elementary school classrooms (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Johnson et al., 1994). Students learn conflict resolution in four stages: (1) mediation techniques, (2) compromise through a six-step

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negotiation process, (3) mediate conflicts between their peers, and (4) practice being mediators (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).
- o Students from kindergarten through 12th grade can "be taught how to engage in problem-solving negotiations and how to mediate their schoolmates' conflicts" (Johnson & Johnson, 2004).
- o The TSP Training is designed as a "12-year spiral curriculum in which students receive the training every year from kindergarten through 12th grades" with the training escalating and becoming "more complex, sophisticated and complete" (Johnson & Johnson, 2004).
- o Students are encouraged to fill out "Conflict Report Forms" to formalize an agreement between the negotiating parties. The form gives the students a physical representation of the conflict's end, as well a reminder of the terms of the agreement.
- o The TSP program instructs educators to:
  - ▪ Create a cooperative context,
  - ▪ Implement the TSP Program, and
  - ▪ Supplement the TSP Program with the instructional use of academic controversies.
- The Conflict Resolution Education Connection (https://creducation.net/teachers/) provides activities, lessons, and vocabulary for Pre-K through 12 that teachers can use to help teach conflict management skills (Warters, n.d.).
  - o The resources include activities such as calming through visualization, assertive speaking, active listening, and an overview on emotional intelligence (these can be found by searching for the relevant keywords).
  - o The site also offers tools to help teachers learn about conflict management and build their skills in managing, reducing, and minimizing conflict.
- Teaching Students to Prevent Bullying: Curriculum resources address identifying, confronting, and stopping bullying (http://www.nea.org/tools/lessons/teaching-students-to-prevent-bullying.html#lp) is a clearinghouse with links, resources, and book/article recommendations provided by the National Education Association (n.d.). The activities are geared toward students in grades K-12, and the lesson plans are aimed at students in grades 2-12.
  Examples of the lessons/activities linked to by the National Education Association include:
  - o "Introduction to the dynamics of bullying" (http://www.pacer.org/bullying/classroom/elementary/ele-lesson-plan.asp) is a lesson for students in grades 2-6, though it can be modified for a younger audience (PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, 2018).
  - o "A Bad Case of Bullying," (http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/case-bullying-using-literature-377.html) is a lesson that helps students reflect on a narrative story about bullying (Cranston, n.d.). The lesson is intended for students in grades 3-5 and it can be completed in three 40-minute blocks.
- Peace First (n.d.) provides resources, games, and toolkits for Pre-K through 8th grade via the Digital Activity Center for educators (http://peacefirst.org/digitalactivitycenter/node/13). Their curriculum addresses themes such as friendship, fairness, cooperation, conflict resolution, and consequences of action. For example, the Peaceful Conflict Resolution Toolkit (http://peacefirst.org/digitalactivitycenter/files/peaceful_conflict_resolution_0.pdf) teaches students to:
  - o Demonstrate courage by addressing conflict directly and sharing their feelings and needs honestly;

- o Show compassion by listening to others' perspectives and empathizing with their experiences; and
- o Work collaboratively with others involved to process the conflict and make a plan for resolution
- The Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Toolkit (https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/conflict-resolution-and-peer-mediation-toolkit.pdf) is a toolkit for use with 6th-12th graders, although it can be modified for younger students (International Research and Exchanges Board & Foundation for Tolerance International, 2013). The toolkit offers an introduction to conflict resolution through peer mediation, sample training plans, exercises, and handouts/forms. The toolkit builds on each previous lesson, helping students enhance their communication and listening skills and their understanding of diversity.
  - o In 2013, IREX followed up with sixteen schools that instituted the peer mediation programs and trainings from the toolkit. From January to July of that year, the schools who implemented the trainings had 90% of mediations resolved in signed mediation agreements (International Research and Exchanges Board & Foundation for Tolerance International, 2013).

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